

Ima Goodstudent

Language Arts-2

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Back in the Waves

According to the Florida Museum of Natural History, there are about 50-75 shark attacks worldwide each year (“International Shark Attack File 2012 Worldwide Shark Attack Summary”). Bethany Hamilton, now a twenty-three year old award winning professional surfer, was one of these people who contributed to that statistic in 2003 when she survived a shark attack at the age of thirteen (Patterson 51). Bethany Hamilton has lived in Hawaii and surfed almost her entire life, and she was training to become a professional surfer when she was attacked and lost her left arm (Viti 33). Although she faced many difficult challenges after the shark attack, she advises those who have dealt with hardship and states, “Stay on top of your game no matter what adversity comes your way. Be your beautiful, healthy, unique self and love beyond yourself!” (Viti 32). Despite the many challenges that she has had to face, Bethany has become a well known surfing figure and inspiration throughout the world, and she continues to surf today. Bethany Hamilton is a passionate surfer who was influenced by her family and her faith in God, struggled through many adversities caused by her shark attack, yet used her accomplishments to inspire faith and hope as her legacy.

To begin, Bethany Hamilton was influenced and inspired by her family and faith in God. Bethany’s religious beliefs were always a strong motivation in her life. Bethany said, “When I was about five years old, I gave my heart to Jesus Christ” (Patterson 51). Bethany attended church on a regular basis, she was involved with religious youth groups and social activities, and

she also went on several mission trips to provide help for others. In addition to her inspiration from God, Bethany has always been greatly influenced by her family. Bethany believed, “There was saltwater in the bloodline” (Hamilton 16). Bethany’s parents were both surfers who moved to Kauai, Hawaii to pursue their love of surfing, and Bethany was inspired by them and began surfing at a very young age. Bethany’s parents started signing her up for surf competitions when she was in grade school, and they had to save up money for the entry fees, airline tickets, car rentals, food, and hotel costs (Hamilton 40). Bethany always had a strong passion for surfing, and she stated, “I love the challenge of becoming the best that I can be on every wave that I ride” (Viti 32). All in all, Bethany Hamilton became an avid and passionate surfer at a young age, and her family and faith in God were her two biggest influences.

Despite her inspirations to surf and her strong faith in God, Bethany struggled through many adversities caused by a shark attack. To begin, Bethany was surfing on the North Shore of Kauai, Hawaii on Halloween morning in 2003 with her friend, Alana Blanchard, like any other normal day; however, unexpectedly a 14-foot tiger shark attacked Bethany, bit off her left arm, and caused her to lose 60% of her blood (Viti 32). Bethany stated, “The shark’s teeth had serrated edges like a steak knife, and they sawed through the board and my bones as if they were tissue paper” (Hamilton 70). Although this could have been a fatal attack, Bethany stayed calm, and her decisive actions saved her life (Patterson 51). The attack was also rough on Bethany’s family and friends, but Bethany kept faith in her religion and tried to keep on a brave face; while in the hospital recovering from surgery she even played practical jokes on her brothers and the nurses (Hamilton 106). It was often a struggle to learn how to live life and perform daily tasks with only one arm, but Bethany was determined to surf again. Bethany went surfing again for the first time only about three weeks after the attack, but she did have doubts that she was going to

fail. Bethany stated, “My first couple tries didn’t work. I was a little bit discouraged. I thought it was going to be easier than it was” (Hamilton 181). Learning how to paddle evenly, placing one hand on the surfboard, and getting up to her feet was a challenge with only one arm; however, Bethany and her dad adapted her surfboard to duck dive under heavy waves by putting a hand strap on the center of her board so she could grab hold of it and use it to push under the white water (Hamilton 183). In addition to adapting to new methods of surfing, Bethany has also developed an even more intense workout training and nutrition regimes to keep in shape (Patterson 52). Throughout all of the adversities that she faced, Bethany kept her faith in God and said, “My faith is the core of who I am. My faith gives me strength and a love for life--- including its adversities” (Viti 34).

Although Bethany has faced many adversities, she has used her accomplishments to inspire faith and hope as her legacy. After her attack, Bethany kept a positive attitude, and she hoped to spread the word of God and inspire others to keep faith. “Raised in a religious household, she clung to the idea that she was part of a bigger plan” (Patterson 51). She appeared on many talk shows such as *Good Morning America* and *Oprah*, and she was interviewed for countless newspaper and magazine articles that were printed worldwide (Patterson 52). In addition, Bethany has volunteered with the World Vision Foundation to help children with disabilities, and she has also attended several mission trips with her church to help others such as visiting Thailand to rebuild homes after a tsunami (Hamilton 196). Furthermore, Bethany started a non-profit organization called Friends of Bethany to help other people who have lost limbs; the organization provides emotional support and tries to help families in financial need to receive prosthetics (Patterson 52). Also, Bethany’s novel *Soul Surfer* reached the top of the bestseller list, and one of her main priorities for writing her story was to help others deal with difficult

times and find belief and faith in God to overcome their struggles (Hamilton 213). Bethany has also won several inspirational awards such as the Best Comeback Athlete ESPY Award in 2004 and the Special Courage Award at the Teen Choice Awards in 2004 (Viti 34). In addition, she has continued to surf competitively and has won numerous surfing awards. In 2004, only three months after her attack, she placed fifth in the Pro Junior NSSA regional event in Hawaii. In 2007, she finished in the top 20 at both the U.S. Open in Huntington and the Reef Hawaiian Pro, and she finished 14th on the Women's World Qualifying Series in 2008 and 2009. Bethany believes, "It's exciting to know that by being who I am and all that I've been through, I've had a positive impact on those who need to overcome an obstacle to accomplish a goal" (Viti 32). Overall, Bethany Hamilton has achieved many great accomplishments and inspired millions of people worldwide to keep their faith and strive for achievements despite adversities that they have encountered.

To conclude, Bethany Hamilton's is a fervent surfer who was influenced by her family and religious faith, struggled through hardships caused by a shark attack, yet used her accomplishments to encourage others to have faith and hope. Bethany overcame a tragic shark attack that could have ended her surfing career or even ended her life, yet her determination to believe in herself and in God has made her known worldwide as a living miracle and inspiration. Bethany believes, "I'm living proof that there's no such thing as a handicap---it's only in your head" (Hamilton, 138). As she continues to travel around the world both surfing in competitions and volunteering to aid others in need, Bethany will continue to build her legacy as a determined and caring soul. "Hamilton strives to remain a symbol of hope and inspiration by touching lives through her platform of faith and sport" (Viti 34). Overall, Bethany Hamilton's legacy of faith and hope to overcome adversity will continue to live on even long after her time.

Works Cited

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